**Informational Writing Prompt: Writing a Biography**

### OVERVIEW

Together, students and teacher use charts and graphic organizers to brainstorm and organize a biography of a famous scientist from the early 1800’s to the present time. By reading informational books during this unit, students will learn about scientists that looked at fossils during the early 1800’s until the present day. The students will “*Write about the person most interesting to you that became a paleontologist*.”

The teacher models the research necessary, how to fill out a timeline organizer, beginning of the first draft, inviting students to help re-phrase, clarify, and revise as the draft is written. Finally, students take what they have learned to complete their own draft independently, revising, and then publishing.

**Writing Situation**:

A biography is simply the story of a life. Biographies can be just a few sentences long, or they can fill an entire book—or two.

* Very short biographies tell the basic facts of someone's life and importance.
* Longer biographies include that basic information of course, with a lot more detail, but they also tell a good story.

Biographies analyze and interpret the events in a person's life. They try to find connections, explain the meaning of unexpected actions or mysteries, and make arguments about the significance of the person's accomplishments or life activities. Biographies are usually about famous people, but a biography of an ordinary person can tell us a lot about a particular time and place. They are often about historical figures, but they can also be about people still living.

Many biographies are written in [chronological](http://www.infoplease.com/ipd/A0373056.html) (arranged in order of time) order. Some group time periods around a major theme (such as "early adversity" or "ambition and achievement”). Still others focus on specific topics or accomplishments.

Biographers use primary and secondary sources:

* Primary sources are things like letters, diaries, or newspaper accounts.
* Secondary sources include other biographies, reference books, or histories that provide information about the subject of the biography.

**Writing Traits:**

For this task, students will write a biographical information essay that will:

1. have a clear purpose, organization, and word choice.
2. contain clear and coherent sentences of varying lengths.
3. use main ideas and supporting details in each paragraph of their biography.
4. have capitalization at the beginning of sentences and proper nouns.
5. use commas correctly if they are making a list.
6. produce a final edited and published piece.

**Resources:**

1. Biography Graphic Organizer included in these lesson plans.
2. Biography Research Notebook organizer included in these lesson plans.
3. Chart paper and chart markers
4. Biography scoring rubric
5. Have-a-go-at-Spelling Form

**Possible Titles for Read Alouds:**

* [*Mary Anning: Fossil Hunter (On My Own Biography)*](http://www.amazon.com/Mary-Anning-Fossil-Hunter-Biography/dp/1575054574/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1305777774&sr=1-1) by [Sally M. Walker](http://www.amazon.com/Sally-M.-Walker/e/B001HCX4MG/ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_1?qid=1305777774&sr=1-1)
* [*Curious Bones: Mary Anning and the Birth of Paleontology* (Great Scientist)](http://www.amazon.com/Curious-Bones-Anning-Paleontology-Scientist/dp/1883846935/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1305777774&sr=1-3) by [Thomas W. Goodhue](http://www.amazon.com/Thomas-W.-Goodhue/e/B001K7T0T4/ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_3?qid=1305777774&sr=1-3)
* [*Rare Treasure: Mary Anning and Her Remarkable Discoveries*](http://www.amazon.com/Rare-Treasure-Anning-Remarkable-Discoveries/dp/0618310819/ref=sr_1_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1305777774&sr=1-4) by [Don Brown](http://www.amazon.com/Don-Brown/e/B000APFOQK/ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_4?qid=1305777774&sr=1-4)
* [*Bone Sharps, Cowboys, and Thunder Lizards: A Tale of Edward Drinker Cope, Othniel Charles Marsh, and the Gilded Age of Paleontology*](http://www.amazon.com/Bone-Sharps-Cowboys-Thunder-Lizards/dp/0966010663/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1305778091&sr=1-1) - by [Jim Ottaviani](http://www.amazon.com/Jim-Ottaviani/e/B001KC6MRW/ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_1?_encoding=UTF8&qid=1305778091&sr=1-1)
* [Dinosaur Hunters (Step into Reading, Step 4)](http://www.amazon.com/Dinosaur-Hunters-Step-into-Reading/dp/039481150X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1305778516&sr=1-1) - by Kate McMullan and John R. Jones

**Approximate Duration of Lesson: 14 - 15 days** (20 – 30 minute sessions)

**Day 1: Teacher Read Aloud/Class Discussion/Teacher Write and Discuss**

1. Choose one of the suggested titles to read to the students to model a biography.
2. Discuss the features of a biography.
3. What kinds of questions might you ask if you are writing a biography? Think about what else you would like to know about the person, and what parts of their life you want to write most about. Some questions you might want to think about include:
   * What makes this person special or interesting?
   * What kind of effect did he or she have on the world? other people?
   * What events shaped or changed this person's life?
   * Did he or she overcome obstacles? Take risks? Get lucky?
   * Would the world be better or worse if this person hadn't lived? How and why?
4. Be sure to tell to answer the questions ‘who, what, where, when, why, and how’ as you write about your person.
5. Collecting **Facts:** Use online sources and books to do your research. To collect new information about your subject, start by reading about it in as many places as possible (i.e., online, library books, reference books, other sources of information.). Take careful notes as you read.

**Day 2: Teacher Read Aloud / Teacher Modeled Blank Biography Organizer/ Teacher and students generate a rubric for a Biographical Essay**

1. Review what was discussed the day before. If necessary, re-read some of the book to remind students of how a biography is organized and written.
2. On a large chart paper, start to generate what the Class Biography Essay rubric will need to have:
3. Biography organizer completely filled out
4. a paragraph about each question generated about the person’s life history.
5. a closing summary statement
6. have a clear purpose, organization, and word choice
7. contain clear and coherent sentences of varying lengths
8. use sequence words to organize the essay (at first, after that, later on, etc.).
9. correctly use capitalization of proper nouns and at the beginning of sentences
10. use commas correctly if they are making a list
11. produce a final published piece
12. **Here are some tips for you to follow that will help with your research and writing. Try them out!**
13. **Select a person you care about.** You may either like or dislike your subject, but it is important that you "feel" strongly one way or the other. If you're not interested in the person, you won't enjoy the process of researching and writing about her/him.
14. **Read an article about your subject (if available).** This will give you the sequence of the person's life. From this information, construct a working outline.
15. **Research your subject thoroughly.** Check the bibliographies of the most recently published books about your subject. Read newspaper, magazine, and Internet articles, or an autobiography; listen to tapes and videos. Set up interviews and write letters to museums, historical societies, colleges and universities. Keep all the notes you take.
16. **Research the historical time period** in which your subject lived and did her/his work.
17. **Cross-reference materials.** Find a fact in three different sources (if possible) to make sure it is accurate. When there is a disagreement between sources, state that there is a conflict and give sources.
18. **Keep general reference books available** — an atlas, dictionary, almanac, historical time line, and others. Use these to add colorful details to the individual's story.
19. **Be objective about your subject.** Tell the truth based on your findings. Don't bury the person's failures because you like her/him, and don't put a negative slant on a fact because you don't like the person. Good biographies are well-balanced, objective representations of a person's life and work. Be honest.
20. **Be as accurate as possible.** After writing the first draft, fact-check all the data again. Then check it one more time.
21. **Write in a clear and convincing way.** If you don't believe what you're writing, neither will your reader.
22. **Tell a good story.** Keep your readers interested.

**Day 3: Complete Teacher Modeled Blank Biography Organizer/List possible student topics/ Hand out student Graphic Organizer Timeline for Biography/Students will begin to read about their person**

1. Introduce the special language used to show sequencing of events. (See attached **organizer of Signal Words**) Choose only 4 or 5 words that you want your second graders to use as they write their Biographical Essay.
2. Using the information on the large chart organizer, show the children the small organizer they will be receiving to do their pre-write. Talk about what the person they might choose to write about.
3. Collecting **Facts:** Use online sources and books to do your research. To collect new information about your subject, start by reading about it in as many places as possible (i.e., online, library books, reference books, other sources of information.). Take careful notes as you read.

### Day 4: Students complete graphic organizer as much as possible on their own/students pair up to brainstorm additional ideas for their organizers/Students share

1. From the information generated on the large chart from the previous writing session, show the children the rough draft you have written using the **5 Signal words**.
2. Read your modeled writing. Showing the children how you circled the organizing words as you used them in your writing.
3. Review the Biography Organizer. Show the biographical timeline and the student Research Notebook.
4. Using the chart of possible topics, have the students choose one of those or one they have thought of on their own. Do not let students duplicate topics.
5. Use the computer lab as necessary to research chosen subjects.

**Day 5 - 7: Teacher discusses the possible questions and answers and how to write them in a paragraph/5 paragraphs about the chosen topic is expected/Teacher models how to write the first paragraph the information gathered from research**

1. Before releasing the students to write their own Biographical rough draft, review everything you expect them to do. Look again at the Large Chart that you modeled how to complete the Biography Organizer. Read to them again your modeled writing that you completed using the information from the chart. Show them the **Signal words listed at the top of the lined paper** and how you used those words in your writing and circled them to make sure you used them.
2. Each paragraph might answer who, what, when, where, and why.
3. Using the Biography Organizer created from Session 2, have the student continue to write their own Biographical essay.

**Day 8 - 11: Teacher Models how to use time words to write biography paragraphs/Students write their own paragraphs in rough draft**

1. Review the Biography Rubric.
2. Repeat the procedure used during Day 5.
3. If you have some students that are progressing and could be used for examples, have them share what they have written before releasing students to continue writing on their own pieces.
4. Remember to emphasize that paragraph **one** will be about early life. Each of the other paragraphs will be about other interesting parts of the person’s life.

**Day 12: Teacher Models concluding statements/Students write concluding statements/Teacher Models using the rubric to revise for word and sentence fluency/ Students revise using the rubric for word and sentence fluency**

1. Review the Biography Rubric

### Now it is time to teacher model revision for word and sentence fluency. Revise the First Draft

1. Try to view your work objectively and see any gaps or problems.
2. Revising involves rethinking your ideas, refining your arguments, reorganizing paragraphs, and rewording sentences. You may need to develop your ideas in more detail, give more evidence to support your claims, or delete material that is unnecessary.
3. Read your paper out loud. This sometimes makes it easier to identify writing that is awkward or unclear.
4. Have somebody else read the paper and tell you if there's anything that's unclear or confusing.

**Day 14-15: Proofread the Final Draft**

1. Look for careless errors such as misspelled words and incorrect [punctuation](http://www.infoplease.com/ipka/A0771337.html) and [capitalization](http://www.infoplease.com/ipka/A0771333.html).
2. Show the students some words that you could revise. Show them how to cross our and write the desired word/s.
3. Pick out 2 sentences that could be revised for fluency or length. Write these sentences on a chart or whiteboard. Talk about how there might be too many words in a list, or not enough description with some words in the sentence. Revise these sentences for fluency.
4. Now tell students to find words in their essay that can be revised and made stronger. When students are finished with their research, pair them according to related choices to allow sharing of information. After the first draft is written, have them spend time revising the work with peers or the teacher.
5. Tell students to find two sentences that need revised for fluency/length, and revise them.
6. Bring students together to see your published writing. Point out all of the required elements for the Compare Contrast Essay.

**Day 14-15: Teacher Models editing and Have-a-go-at-Spelling/Students edit and complete Have-a-go-at-Spelling / Teacher Models publishing/Students begin publishing/ Students complete publishing making sure the required rubric is met**

1. Show students how you edited and published your piece of writing so that they know what they need to do to complete the writing task.
2. Students will make any revisions and editing necessary in order to publish their writing today.
3. Some students will need to edit today.
4. Some students might be ready to write their published piece today.

**Biography Organizer**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Biography Graphic Organizer | | | |
| Name of Person: | | | |
| Birth (date and place) | | Early life, the family, education, |
| Adult life | | Major accomplishments, (how the accomplishments changed the world) |
| Death (date and place). | | Something Unusual! |
| **Research Notebook** | | |

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| http://teacher.scholastic.com/images/spacer.gif |
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| **RESEARCH NOTEBOOK**  **BIOGRAPHY SUBJECT:** |
| **Question 1:** \_  **Answer 1:** \_  **Source(s):** \_ |
| **Question 2:** \_  **Answer 2:** \_  **Source(s):** \_ |
| **Question 3:** \_  **Answer 3:** \_  **Source(s):** \_ |
| **Question 4:** \_  **Answer 4:** \_  **Source(s):** \_ |
| **Question 5:** \_  **Answer 5:** \_  **Source(s):** \_ |
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Biographical Essay Scoring Rubric 6 + 1

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Ideas:**

Clear and Focused 5 4 3 2 1

Fully Addresses Biographical Essay 5 4 3 2 1

**Organization:**

It clearly has beginning middle and end: 5 4 3 2 1

5 paragraphs with interesting sentences: 5 4 3 2 1

**Sentence Fluency:**

Variety of sentence lengths: 5 4 3 2 1

Interesting (no repetitions) 5 4 3 2 1

**Word Choice:**

Meaning clear: 5 4 3 2 1

**Voice:**

Writer’s voice come through 5 4 3 2 1

**Conventions:**

Appropriate grade level spelling: 5 4 3 2 1

Appropriate grammar, punctuation, capitalization: 5 4 3 2 1

Contains few, if any errors: 5 4 3 2 1

**Presentation:**

Legible handwriting: 5 4 3 2 1

Neat in appearance: 5 4 3 2 1